

## **Needham Human Rights Committee Meeting Minutes February 25, 2016**

Amelia Klein and Marlene Schultz, co-chairs, called the meeting to order at 7:30pm in the conference room of the Broadmeadow School.

Committee members in attendance: Abdul Cader Asmal, Cynthia Ganung, Jennifer Howard, Ashok Mehta, Marlene Schultz (co-chair & recorder), Amelia Klein (co-chair) Barry Ehrlich, Bud Schram, Jeremy Sutherland.

Committee members absent: Jo-Anne Coffey-McCormick

Guests: Nate Goldman and Zeinab Haghighatjoo

1. **Minutes** of the January 21, 2016 NHRC meeting were unanimously approved.
2. **Old Business**
  - a. Committee Members: the NHRC still has two open positions for membership. Police Chief John Schlitter does plan to send a representative from the Police Department, as per the Committee rules. Jeremy has been speaking with a student who may be interested in serving on the committee.
  - b. Webpage: Marlene and Amelia reported that they have again been in touch with Sandy at the Town Hall to alert them of the problems with showing the monthly agenda and minutes on the website. This month, in addition to the monthly agenda and minutes, the NHRC intends to post the questions and answers generated from the community forum, A Conversation with Muslim Neighbors.
  - c. Follow up to Needham community members concerns raised last month: Marlene reported writing to Amy Yok-Ming and Patrick Burns to encourage them to speak to the Eliot School counselor about their concerns regarding a pattern of racially charged incidents at their school. Marlene encouraged them to contact the NHRC after that action. She has not heard anything back from them yet. The NHRC discussed whether to and/or how to follow up. Jennifer pointed to the school district's stated goals and corresponding progress report related to improving the district's competency in cultural proficiency and ability to address matters of diversity, racism, and bias existing in our community. Discussion included identifying some of the programming happening, particularly at the high school, as well as some of the issues that have come to the surface in the high school that go toward understanding the

environment there. The NHRC agreed that the committee should follow up with the District about what is being done to meet these goals.

d. Public Forum: A Conversation with Our Muslim Neighbors. With 173 people (representing a wide range of ages and backgrounds) in attendance and great coverage in the Needham Times, the event marked a great success for the NHRC and the community at large. The Needham Channel recorded the event. Comments demonstrated an appreciation that the panel humanized many of the issues/questions community members were curious about related to Islam, and provided a tangible discussion. Thank you to all who organized and executed the event, especially Abdul, Marlene and Amelia.

Some suggestions from the audience were: having a follow up to allow for more oral questions to be asked by the audience, to advertise more next time, allow more time for questions, experience a Muslim prayer service, arrange house of worship exchanges to include a visit to a mosque and to direct future programming to the schools and also during the day for seniors. North Hill is interested in hosting some kind of follow up event.

Responses to Questions: Abdul Cader spent a great deal of time and effort writing responses to the many questions posed by audience members at the event. As promised, these responses will be posted on the NHRC website. The committee reviewed Abdul Cader's responses and made some suggestions to further clarify some answers. Once updated, the answers will be posted very soon so as not to lose momentum.

Next Steps: Post Q&A answers. Explore follow up programming.

### **3. Reports**

a. Meeting with AGSA students: Amelia and Marlene met again with the students, who have been brainstorming some ideas for small workshops to share their stories. April 15 is the Day of Silence at the high school. The committee decided it might be better to do an event in the fall with them so that they can focus on the follow up to the Islam event. It was suggested maybe AGSA could do a workshop at the Diversity Summit, drawing on specific questions about transgender issues. Amelia and Marlene will continue to have contact with the group.

b. Immigration Task Force: Cynthia reported the task force is exploring how our community could support refugees settling in the area. There will be an exploration meeting March 8 to find supporters for action. They will also be looking at partnering with the International Institute of

New England, an existing group that works on this very issue. Cynthia will send details.

c. Diversity Initiative: Meeting will be March 17. Jennifer reported the photo project has not received many families who wish to participate. Deciding whether this project will go forward. Nothing further to report at this time. The NDI is presenting an event together with WOW – World of Wellesley on March 22, 2016 on Parenting & Privilege, at the Eliot School in Needham.

d. Schools: Jeremy reported 2 gender-neutral bathrooms have been established in the high school. The Needham Channel interviewed Jeremy. This is a temporary solution, showing at least some progress on the concerns raised by students at NHS.

e. Town issues: no report.

#### **4. New Business:**

None.

Upcoming recorders:

March 17 - Amelia

April 28 (4<sup>th</sup> Thursday) - Ashok

May 19 - Bud

June 16- Barry Ehrlich

Meeting adjourned at 9:05 pm.

**NEXT MEETING THURSDAY, March 17, 2016 7:30PM.**

Respectfully submitted,  
Jennifer Howard